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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 08 TEL AVIV 001017

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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA  
HQ USAF FOR XXXX  
DA WASHDC FOR SASA  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA  
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS](#) [KMDR](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#) [REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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This morning, the electronic media reported that the IDF Special Forces surrounded the Jericho jail in which Palestinians responsible for the assassination of Israeli cabinet minister Rehavam Zeevi, including PFLP leader Ahmed Saadat, are being held. The media quoted Palestinian sources as saying that two Palestinians were killed in the operation. Maariv reported that in recent days, US sources have conveyed a message that the US will not be able to ensure that the Palestinians will not release the murderers. The newspaper wrote that the UK would not be able to give Israel assurances on the matter either. Israel Radio reported that the GOI took the initiative of blockading the prison after it learned that the US and UK monitors left it without informing Israel.

All media (lead story in Ha'aretz) reported that Acting PM Ehud Olmert is expected to declare Ariel a part of Israel when he visits the city today, Ha'aretz quoted official sources as saying that he will bring a "message of conciliation" to the settlers, and a commitment to the settlement blocs. The newspaper reported that Olmert will also call on West Bank settlers to join his "internal dialogue" on establishing a permanent border between Israel and the Palestinians. All media echoed a Channel 2-TV report broadcast last night that construction work had begun on the new police HQ in the controversial E1 zone between Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim. PM Sharon approved building the HQ in E1 last August. Ha'aretz wrote that the US did not voice an objection to the construction. Maariv reported that the headquarters' construction started despite the United States' opposition.

Major media reported that Shimon Peres, number two in Kadima, met with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas in Jordan on Sunday. Olmert and the defense and foreign ministers were briefed ahead of the meeting, and Peres also briefed Olmert afterwards. Leading media reported that Labor Party Chairman Amir Peretz persuaded Olmert to let Peres hold the meeting. Similar to reports in other media, Ha'aretz reported that Jerusalem sources played down the importance of the meeting, saying it lasted only 20 minutes and focused on "projects." The sources were quoted as saying that Olmert was not thrilled about the meeting, but that he had difficulty preventing Peres from conducting it. Ha'aretz further quoted its sources as saying: "Peres did not convey any messages. It was made clear to him that this was not a political talk, and that this is not a new venue to the Palestinians." Maariv reported that Peres and Abbas discussed political issues.

Israel Radio reported that Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman will arrive in Israel on Wednesday and meet with Olmert, FM Tzipi Livni, and Defense Minister

Shaul Mofaz. The radio quoted senior GOI sources as saying that Egypt is interested in keeping gates to Hamas. Israel Radio reported that Egypt is also pressuring the Palestinians.

The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that the Pentagon has been evaluating the possibility of Israel launching an independent strike to thwart Iranian attempts to develop nuclear weapons. The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that one of the main questions raised during discussions at the US Defense Department was whether Israel would inform the US in advance of such an attack and how much advance notice would be given. The Jerusalem Post reported that US administration sources pointed out that Israel would obviously have to coordinate with the US, whose forces would control any attempt to fly over Iraq on the way to Iran if the IAF chose to attack using the shortest route. The Jerusalem Post quoted the sources as saying that former IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon's remarks last week on Israel's striking capability were not the trigger for the Pentagon consultations. The newspaper quoted the sources as saying that there was a sense in the US administration that the Iranian issue was gaining urgency. The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio cited The Washington Post as saying Monday that the Bush administration has made Iran a top priority issue. Yediot reported that a "well-known Iranian academic" told a senior Israeli diplomat several days ago that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a weak president despised by the most influential members of the Tehran regime because they view him as incompetent.

Yediot reported that the diplomatic section of the Likud's platform disappeared from the party's web site. Yediot found that Likud Knesset Members Michael Eitan and Uzi Landau have decided to present a more optimistic version of the party's platform, leaving an opening for peace with the Palestinians. Maariv reported that the Likud secretly proposed cooperation to the Labor Party, which declined. Maariv reported that Shas and Yisrael Beiteinu declined similar Likud offers.

Ha'aretz reported that Israel is preventing some 2,000 Palestinians who have left the Jordan Valley from returning to the area, in an effort to keep them from demanding their land back.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a high-ranking Israeli security official told the newspaper on Monday that global Jihad terror cells affiliated with Al Qaida, operating in the Sinai desert and stationed 30 km from Israel's border, have drawn up plans to abduct IDF troops, border policemen, and civilians.

Citing Reuters, Ha'aretz quoted Western diplomatic sources as saying Monday that Washington plans to curtail contacts with Abbas's Fatah faction and other parties if they join a Palestinian government led by Hamas.

Yediot reported that the GOI has conveyed a warning to the Lebanese government, demanding that it restrain Hizbullah. Yediot wrote that Israel's message is that it views Lebanon as responsible for any escalation at its border with Israel, and that Lebanon should know that Israel's response will be tough. Maariv reported that Israel asked UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to warn the leaders of the Syrian and Lebanese administrations against escalation in the region.

On Monday and today, major media reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and National

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Security Advisor Stephen Hadley are among the witnesses whom defense lawyers want to subpoena in the case of Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman, two pro-Israel lobbyists accused of receiving classified information. The media said that there is no indication whether the judge in the case has considered the subpoena requests.

Yediot reported that Peter Costello, the Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia, told Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer and Israel Finance Ministry DG Yossi Bachar several days ago in Australia that France will oppose Israel's entrance into the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Costello was quoted as saying that Australia will push for Israel's entry to the OECD. Yediot cited the French Embassy in Israel as saying that it cannot respond at this time and that it is unaware of France's opposition to Israel joining the OECD.

Ha'aretz reported that voting in the Knesset elections

will kick off on Wednesday at midnight, when the polling station at the Israeli Embassy in Canberra opens. Over the course of nearly 25 hours, almost 4,000 potential voters at nearly 100 Israeli embassies and other entities can exercise their democratic rights. Only official emissaries can vote abroad.

Israel Radio and major news web sites reported that this morning, the Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court sentenced Likud MK Naomi Blumenthal to eight months in jail, a month after she was found guilty of bribery and obstruction of justice. Blumenthal, who is in the 18th slot on the Likud list of Knesset candidates, was also given 10 months probation, and fined 70,000 shekels (around USD 14,800).

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Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Columnist Ari Shavit wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "[Ehud Olmert's] radical unilateral process will disrupt the American strategy in the area and will bury U.S. President George W. Bush's dream of stability and democracy in the Middle East."

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "An opportunity is arising now, almost of its own accord, to coordinate a two-phase initiative with the US and Europe, first giving a chance to the road map, and then a unilateral convergence into expanded settlement blocs.... Let us not waste time."

Yossi Ben-Aharon, who was director-general of the Prime Minister's Office under former prime minister Yitzhak Shamir, argued in Maariv: "Olmert doesn't understand that instead of eroding the motivation of Palestinian terrorism, he is eroding Israel's independence and sovereignty."

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "American aid, if even it were purely humanitarian, might eventually indirectly assist terrorist bodies."

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach commented in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "When there's no identification, there's no emotional anchor to connect to. When there isn't such an anchor, it's no wonder that everything is floating."

Block Quotes:  
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I. "Olmert's Arrogance"

Columnist Ari Shavit wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 14): "At first glance, Olmert's [emerging new disengagement] plan appears enchanting -- no fear, no hesitation, and very Israeli. Here, we'll take our destiny in our own hands. Within three years we'll evacuate some 80,000 settlers. Within less than five years, we will undergo a final disengagement from the Palestinians and converge within the borders of a flourishing lowlands country.... And so, in one term, we would isolate ourselves from all the sickness and terrors of the Middle East. So simple. So clear.... However, on second glance it becomes clear that the Olmert plan has a small flaw: it has no Palestinians. This is a plan whose logic is simplistic and patronizing.... Via the nearly complete withdrawal, Olmert will promise Hamas almost total control in the Palestinian state for generations. The Palestine of Olmert will be hostile, dissatisfied and violent.... But it is not just the stability of Israel that Olmert is endangering. He is also endangering the regional stability. A Hamas state will accelerate Jordan's collapse. There is no chance that the Hashemite rule will stand up against a Palestinian state on its doorstep whose religious fervor has just subdued the Zionists. Egypt will also be threatened.... And Olmert will be supporting not only anti-Israeli terror, but also the anti-Western revolutionary movement. His radical unilateral process will disrupt the American strategy in the area and will bury U.S. President George W. Bush's dream of stability and democracy in the Middle East. The Land of Israel must be divided. The occupation must end. A two-state solution is

necessary. But the Hamas victory has made a two-state solution more distant and more complicated."

## II. "Convergence -- The Proper Plan"

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (March 14): "Ehud Olmert's convergence plan is the right move, in the face of a bloodthirsty and Intifada-seeking Palestinian regime. Yasser Arafat was opposed to peace, Abu Mazen is unable, and Khaled Mashal and Ismail Haniyeh are terrible in their own right. In the foreseeable future, there is no one to talk to in Ramallah.... An opportunity is arising now, almost of its own accord, to coordinate a two-phase initiative with the US and Europe, first giving a chance to the road map, and then a unilateral convergence into expanded settlement blocs. A window of opportunity has opened, and it could close. Let us not waste time. It seems to me that Olmert's convergence is the most effective integrative plan for the foreseeable future, and he did well not to behave as his predecessor Ariel Sharon and deceive the electorate, but rather to present his opinion with maximum transparency. The power of this opinion is demonstrated by the two types of responses that it received. One belongs to the confused camp of the Labor Party, in its former and current makeup. Shimon Peres is already in Kadima, but has not yet accepted the construction of the separation fence, which is increasingly proving to be a unique strategic asset. Everyone already gets it, just not him. Therefore, he cannot bring himself to support the plan, although he is the candidate immediately after Olmert. Similar to him is Amir Peretz, who says 'no, but yes' and 'yes, but no'.... The other response came from Binyamin Netanyahu. The Likud is proposing the alternative of focusing on the battle against Hamas. Not to talk about concessions or contingency plans, but to fight against Hamas and nothing else. This is a misguided approach -- important but narrow."

## III. "Convergence Means Capitulation"

Yossi Ben-Aharon, who was director-general of the Prime Minister's Office under former prime minister Yitzhak Shamir, argued in Maariv (March 14): "It is ... amazing that none of [the Israeli leaders] who led [peace] initiatives have learned anything from their predecessors' initiatives.... Instead of investing efforts to 'erode the motivation' of the Palestinians and to strengthen the security of Israel's citizens, Olmert and [his top aide Dov] Weisglass rush to Washington to get its blessing for the implementation of a further withdrawal that would benefit Palestinian terror.... Olmert doesn't understand that instead of eroding the motivation of Palestinian terrorism, he is eroding Israel's independence and sovereignty."

## IV. "US Will Indirectly Assist Hamas"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (March 14): "It is difficult to explain the sudden change in the United States' Mideast policy. It is doubtful whether it will lead to the advancement of peace in the region. American aid, if even it were purely humanitarian, might eventually indirectly assist terrorist bodies yearning to introduce a Khomeinist regime ... in the region. They don't even deny it."

## V. "Everything Is Floating"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach commented in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 14): "At this time, the polls define around twenty percent of the public as floating votes.... What is orchestrating these elections, the very reason for holding them in the first place -- Ariel Sharon's huge popularity, which crossed borders and parties -- has disappeared from the scene.... [Olmert] said in an interview that during his term, Israel would be a country whose residents are pleased to live in. His campaign and that of his competitors haven't outlined such a country. [Those campaigns] haven't produced new hopes, proposed changes in our lives, or explained why it would be better to live here. They didn't create identifications with figures, parties, plans, or platforms. People like Ben-Gurion, Begin, Rabin, or Sharon, who can be relied upon, haven't come into view. Neither have inspirational ideas. When there's no identification, there's no emotional anchor to connect to. When there isn't such an anchor, it's no wonder that everything is floating."